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UNCLAS ABUJA 000506

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL HA NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA OFFERS ARISTIDE A "STAGING POST" FOR A FEW WEEKS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, NOT FOR PUBLICATION ON THE INTERNET OR INTRANET.

¶11. (SBU) In response to what it said was a request from the Caribbean Economic Community (CARICOM), on March 22 the GON offered Haitian ex-president Aristide refuge in Nigeria for a few weeks before moving on to another destination. President Obasanjo's press spokesman, Oluremi ("Remi") Oyo, issued a press release (text below) to that effect and said much the same thing in interviews carried by BBC radio and other outlets.

¶12. (SBU) The press release says the GON agreed after consultations with African leaders, the African Union leadership, the USG and "other concerned authorities." Staff at the Foreign Ministry and at the office of the National Security Advisor told us March 23 they learned of the offer from the press, and know nothing about such consultations. The Presidency told us Aristide has not yet responded to the offer (as of noon March 23), and said it had no information on the USG and other consultations mentioned in the press release.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: Two items seem important: Will Aristide come, and if so under what terms? Confusion over what was agreed when Charles Taylor came to Nigeria has long been a problem. Taylor is not the only political exile in Nigeria, which has a history of offering asylum to fleeing leaders. Post requests guidance from the Department on discussing Aristide with the GON, and talking points for the public on whatever USG role there may or may not have been in the Nigerian offer to Aristide.

¶14. (U) Begin text of the Nigerian Presidency press release:

NIGERIA GRANTS CARICOM REQUEST ON FORMER HAITIAN LEADER

The Caribbean Economic Community (CARICOM) under the leadership of Prime Minister P.J. Patterson of Jamaica, has requested Nigeria to consider giving former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide of Haiti "a staging post" for a few weeks until his movement to another destination.

After receiving the CARICOM request, Nigeria undertook widespread consultations with African leaders, the leadership of the African Union, the U.S. Government and other concerned authorities.

Following the concurrence received after those consultations, Nigeria has agreed to grant the request from CARICOM.

Oluremi Oyo (Mrs.)
SSA to the President

end text.
ROBERTS